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SUBJECT: French Foreign Minister visits DRC

¶1. French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner pledged France's support for the Kivus conference's Acte d'Engagement during his January 25-26 visit to Kinshasa and Goma and announced his government's intention to open two new consulates in the DRC to assist in implementing the peace process. Following their January 25 meeting in Kinshasa, President Kabila told the press he would send all FDLR fighters back to Rwanda, including those responsible for genocide, and asked Kouchner to deliver that message to Rwandan President Kigame when he arrived in Kigali.

¶2. Kouchner expressed a desire to strengthen bilateral relations in his meeting with Kabila, a theme he reinforced in with Prime Minister Gizenga the same day. He expressed hope that the DRC would host the first post-2008 Francophonie summit. He recognized that France had been "cut off" from the DRC for several years and would like to renew their friendship. He announced that France was ready to make further financial commitments in addition to the \$294 million it had pledged in March 2007 to assist the Congolese education, health and environmental sectors.

¶3. Kouchner flew to Goma January 26, where he met with National Assembly President Vital Kamerhe. He also visited the Mugunga IDP camp outside of Goma and Heal Africa, a local hospital that specializes in treating victims of sexual violence.

¶4. Note: Press reports indicated that the new consulates would be situated in Goma and Bukavu. In fact, the French Embassy's political counselor told us January 31 that his government had yet to decide on their locations. End note.

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